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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Written statement submitted by the Anglican Consultative Council, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[7 April 1997]

1. The Anglican Consultative Council, through the Anglican Communion Office at the United Nations, representing 70 million persons in 164 different countries, is pleased to share its thoughts with the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-third session.

2. The Anglican United Nations Office has received significant information identifying the oppression of Christian and other minority groups within Pakistan. We are especially concerned about horrific incidents which have taken place in rural areas in Pakistan where Christian communities have been harmed and victimized by certain criminal elements within the country.

3. The Roman Catholic Church in Khanewal was attacked twice as a mob lead by certain fundamental elements burned the church and set it ablaze. Other Protestant Christian centres, houses of worship and properties have been either burned, seized or destroyed. The village of Shantinager, in the district of Khanewal, in southern Punjab, which has a population of about 10,000 Christians and contained 13 churches, a school and a hospital, was badly damaged.

4. It must be said that the Government of Pakistan made an earnest effort to rescue the people from harm, administered first-aid treatment, and sought to provide humanitarian assistance. However, it may also be said that the Government of Pakistan must offer stronger public support to the victimized. It is distressing to hear that after this incident, no national leader visited the site to offer words of support to those who had lost their homes and property, or to guarantee their safety from future attacks.

5. It is understandable that no Government can guard against all forms of anti-social behaviour. It is also understandable that no Government can protect its people at all times from entities which seek to exploit people and situations along religious lines. It must be said that one of the basic purposes of a strong Government is to actively prosecute those who are guilty and to champion those whose rights and freedoms have been violated.

6. The Anglican United Nations Office has also received news about the infringement of the rights of other minority groups in Pakistan. It is our understanding that considerable progress to promote national peace and reconciliation can be achieved through dialogue and through third-party mediation. We appeal therefore to this body to urge the Government of Pakistan to use its good offices to give audience to those whose rights have been abridged and to ensure the equal protection of all its citizens.

7. In an age where those who pursue parochial interests seem to be more vocal than the interests and aspirations of what appears to be a silent majority, assemblies of Governments, in bodies like these, must work together to foster dialogue and the management of conflict through negotiation.

8. The Anglican Consultative Council commends all the member Governments of this august body to support all efforts to ensure that the rights of minority groups are protected. Part of this appeal involves a request that the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance be provided with the necessary resources to carry out his mandate to develop policy recommendations. It has come to our attention that much of the difficulty encountered in facilitating the work of the Special Rapporteur involves the provision of resources at levels which are not commensurate with his charge.

9. The protection of minority groups in any country, and in this specific case of Christians in Pakistan, cannot be guaranteed until a Government musters the political will to achieve the same. The Government of Pakistan and other member Governments of this Commission must devise firm standards of public accountability if the confidence of the political system is to be sustained.

10. Many Governments would probably share the view that the rights of minority communities within their territorial boundaries should not be abridged. Many Governments have also enacted specific national legislation to support this concern. However, much more may be done by Governments when they publicly and openly express their commitment to protect the rights of minority communities. The political will to achieve this end must exist, and the political machinery to implement it must be made available to make this goal a reality.

11. In this context, we urge the Government of Pakistan to step up efforts to express its determination to protect the rights of the Christian community in Pakistan whose members have suffered at the hands of certain groups. We also urge this Commission to develop a more formal mechanism for facilitating dialogue and reconciliation in the wake of violent conflict. This protection will not encroach upon the sovereignty of any State. Indeed, religious bodies and non-governmental organizations can complement the work of the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance, especially in those areas where governmental efforts have met with limited success.